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UK CORRESPONDENT ON RUSSIAN ACTIVITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

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LD170941 LONDON THE TIMES IN ENGLISH 17 JUNE 80 PP 1,8

(ROBERT FISK DISPATCH: "AFGHAN GUERRILLAS APPEAL FOR 10,000 GUNS AS RUSSIANS SEND IN ANOTHER DIVISION")

(TEXCERPTS) KABUL, 16 JUN--THE RUSSIANS HAVE JUST SENT THEIR 104TH PARACHUTE DIVISION INTO BAGRAM, 45 MILES NORTH OF THE CAPITAL, AND THE 105TH--WHICH ARRIVED SHORTLY AFTER THE SOVIET INTERVENTION LAST DECEMBER--HAS NOW BEEN BROKEN INTO THREE INDEPENDENT REGIMENTS OPERATING OUT OF KANDAHAR, BAGRAM AND SHINDAND.

THERE ARE NOW SEVEN SOVIET MOTORIZED RIFLE DIVISIONS IN AFGHANISTAN--THERE WERE ONLY FIVE LAST FEBRUARY--SPARED OVER KABUL, HERAT, MAZAR E-SHARIF, KONDUZ, GHAZNI, JALABAD AND POLEKUMRI ¹⁹¹ _{-191 + 125} ON THE SALANG ROAD. ALTHOUGH THE UNITED STATES STATE DEPARTMENT STILL INSISTS THERE ARE ONLY AROUND 80,000 SOVIET TROOPS HERE, THE TOTAL, INCLUDING SUPPLY AND LOGISTICS UNITS, MUST NOW COME TO MORE THAN 110,000 MEN.

ANOTHER DISTURBING ADDITION TO THE SOVIET ARMOURY HAS BEEN THE ARRIVAL IN KABUL OF A FLEET OF LARGE MI8 HELICOPTERS WHICH CAN DOUBLE AS BOTH TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT AND HEAVY BOMBERS. IT MEANS THAT THE RUSSIANS ARE NOW CAPABLE OF CONCENTRATING TROOPS IN INACCESSIBLE MOUNTAINS WITHOUT RISKING THE CASUALTIES OF A

EVERY DAY, THE SOVIET AIRLINE AEROFLOT IS FLYING TWO DOZEN OR MORE PASSENGER AIRCRAFT INTO KABUL AIRPORT LOADED WITH TROOPS AND EQUIPMENT.

I SAW ONE AEROFLOT JET IN KABUL YESTERDAY WHICH WOULD HAVE WHETTED EVEN FURTHER WAS THATCHER'S PROFOUND CYNICISM OF SOVIET INTENTIONS. THE AIRCRAFT BORE AEROFLOT'S RPOUND ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SLOGAN "OFFICIAL OLYMPIC CARRIER" ON BOTH SIDES OF ITS FUSELAGE. FROM ITS DOORS IT WAS DISGORING SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS--SOME WITH BLOND HAIR-- CARRYING THEIR RIFLES IN THE SUN AS THEY WALKED DOWN THE STEPS TO THE TARMAC.

IN MAY ALONE, 600 SERIOUSLY WOUNDED SOVIET SERVICEMEN (INCLUDING HELICOPTER CREWS) WERE ADMITTED TO THE AFGHAN MILITARY HOSPITAL NEAR KABUL AIRPORT, AND ADMISSIONS TO THE SMALLER SOVIET CLINICS NEAR THE BUS STATION AT KHAI KHANA WERE BELIEVED TO TOTAL ABOUT 400.

TWO HUNDRED OF THIS 1,000 ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE DIED OF THEIR WOUNDS--BUT THIS FATALITY RATE INCLUDES ONLY THOSE SOLDIERS WHO INCLUDES ONLY THOSE SOLDIERS WHO EXPIRED IN HOSPITAL. TROOPS WHO ARE KILLED IN ACTION ARE TAKEN IMMEDIATELY TO KABUL AIRPORT WHERE THEIR BODIES ARE TAKEN HOME ON BOARD A SERIES OF OLD ANTONOV 12 TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT.

THE COFFINS ARE WOODEN BOXES AND YOU CAN SEE THEM BEING LOADED FROM A DIRT TRACK TO THE EAST OF THE AIRPORT. NO ONE KNEW WHAT THEY CONTAINED UNTIL SOMEONE CAUGHT SIGHT OF A SOVIET SOLDIER SALUTING A BOX AS IT WAS HAULED INTO AN AIRCRAFT.

17 JUN 1205Z DN/CAJ